

**Politicizing Islam: The Islamic Revival in France and India**, by Z. Fareen Parvez. New York, Oxford University Press, 2017, xiv+269pp., £59(hardback), ISBN 9780190225247

Z. Fareen Parvez's book *Politicizing Islam: The Islamic Revival in France and India* examines the lived experiences of Muslims and considers the limitations and dangers of accepting simplistic contemporary stereotypes of faithful Muslims. This is compelling subject matter at a time when openly religious Muslims are frequently assumed to harbour radical sympathies and can face discrimination and violence.

The appalling terrorist attack at Christchurch's mosques during March 2019 underscores the challenges and dangers that openly religious Muslims can face. Yet while it has become easy in recent times to blame rising anti-Muslim attitudes, particularly in the West, on prejudice given licence by President Trump's spicier Tweets, the challenges faced by Muslim minority populations pre-date the Trump presidency, and that is one reason why Dr Parvez's book is important.

Based on two years of ethnographic fieldwork undertaken between 2005 and 2014, Dr Parvez documents the lived experience of Muslims in the French city of Lyon and Indian city of Hyderabad in the decade before @realDonaldTrump became @Potus. During this time Narendra Modi's brand of Hindutva nationalism was on the rise and had a major political break-through at the 2014 Indian general election, while French politics encouraged by the Front National, took a decidedly anti-Muslim turn during Nicolas Sarkozy's presidency with an official public spaces ban on face coverings like the burqa. Dr Parvez describes how, 'The surveillance and politicization of Islam constitute the backdrop of everyday religious life for Muslims in France and India' (p.2), and against this backdrop asks, 'how do Muslims, as denigrated minorities, mobilize to improve their situations through their Islamic revival?' (p.2).

Like many Muslim populations, India and France's Muslim communities have undergone Islamic revivals during the last two decades that have been outwardly marked by increased emphasis on matters of Muslim identity, the increased visibility of women's veiling, and rise of Salafist Islam. Much of her fieldwork research was undertaken with women, and this led Dr Parvez to argue throughout the book that women stood at the forefront of Islamic revival in both Lyon and Hyderabad, wearing and defending the headscarf or other forms of veiling, and leading mosque classes and teaching circles.

By situating the research in France and India, Dr Parvez selected countries where state secularism and the existence of the largest Muslim minorities in Asia and Europe provide for a productive comparative study. A central question of the book is, given the similarities in religious dynamics across these research sites, why did their politics diverge? The answer, Dr Parvez's explained, can be found by examining the different types of secularism in France and India which created conditions for differing types of political claims made by religious minorities in these two countries. The book addressed this by considering the histories of French and Indian state secularism and suggested the contradictions of these secularisms have served to marginalise Muslim populations, but in differing ways, by determining the

types of political claims Muslims would make as well as the possibilities for them to force an identity and movement across class lines. The tensions within Muslim communities about whether to prioritise economic redistribution or religious recognition are a central feature of Chapters 3-5.

France's assimilationist model of secularism for instance is argued to have stigmatised public demonstrations of religion, leading French middle-class Muslims to prioritise claims for religious recognition over matters of economic redistribution, and creating barriers to cross-class identification and organisation, isolating France's working-class Muslims from the middle class, and consequently from mainstream and representative politics. Something different is argued to have happened in India where a pluralist model of secularism, by claiming to guarantee religious liberties, contributed to a focus among middle class and elite Muslims on economic redistribution to the poor, and on seeking social change such as the economic advancement of women. This, Dr Parvez argued, led to stronger cross-class relations.

Alienation from the state is strikingly illustrated within the subsection of Chapter 4 titled 'Employing Shari'a for Women's Rights' (p.111) which outlined the way some Hyderabad Muslim women's activists advocate shari'a marriage laws as a means of improving women's circumstances. When it came to matters like divorce some of Hyderabad's Muslim women were described as being, 'able to employ shari'a to their benefit, and they preferred this legal avenue over turning to the state' (p.111). Presenting a perspective that will no doubt be cause for debate among scholars, Dr Parvez explained, 'Women's activities contradict popular images and opinions of shari'a as a set of oppressive, medieval legal injunctions.' (p.111).

Working-class Muslims' alienation from the French state has been a key cause of political concern throughout the post-9-11 era and Dr Parvez suggested that working-class Muslims worked more for their own religious salvation than for any collective project, describing how poor Muslim women in Lyon retreated from the public sphere embracing an 'antipolitics' (p.150) that emphasised spiritual conditions in a way that could avoid the heavy hand of an overwhelming state. In direct contrast to the French state which insisted veiling in public spaces harmed society as anti-social and symbolised sectarian loyalty, many research participants considered, 'all matters of the self and body (along with family and intimate relations) as private' (p.21). Dr Parvez described her research participants as often at odds with the French state about whether veiling was a public or private matter and characterised veiling as part of a retreat from politics. This is certainly a valid perspective and it is compellingly argued, but the opposite reading is also possible – that increased public veiling represents a form of resistance and political claim-making.

Engagement with research participants over an extended time allowed Dr Parvez to delve deeply into debates around piety and veiling that will be of considerable interest to academics and policy makers. This book represents a comprehensive and compelling study of openly religious Muslims in France and India, but considering the proportion of ISIS brides

originating in France during the time the fieldwork was undertaken, an extended examination of the pressures religious Muslim women might have faced to engage with such groups might have added even extra value to a high quality publication.

In the post-9-11 period writing about Islam too frequently presents differences within Muslim communities with distinctions like moderate, radical, or jihadi, but this book provides important insights allowing readers to go beyond these unhelpful descriptions. Dr Parvez's book represents significant scholarship of modern Islamic communities and provides a major contribution to our understanding of the motivations of openly religious Muslims and the economic and political challenges they face.

Ronan Lee  
International State Crime Initiative  
Queen Mary University of London

ronan.lee@qmul.ac.uk  
@Ronan\_Lee